

Conference explores higher ed's mission

By STEPHEN FOSTER BLACK

With the recent release of new census data on poverty, we learned that the number of Americans without health insurance is continuing to increase. There are currently 47 million uninsured people in our country, 8.5 million more than there were in 2000.

No matter how hard state governments work to increase efficiency, improve education, health care and so on, true progress can only be built on values. Progressive change in Alabama will require a spirituality of social responsibility — a reason for action that transcends individual interest.

As a college education becomes more critical in equipping our citizens for an increasingly competitive world economy, we must not forget the role our system of higher education can and should play in preparing students to serve as effective, engaged and ethical citizens.

GEORGE WILL

Iraq hurts Marines

QUANTICO, Va.

Here at "the crossroads of the Marine Corps," some officers are uneasily pondering a paradox. No service was better prepared than the Marines for the challenges of postinvasion Iraq, yet no service has found its mission there more unsettling to its sense of itself.

When asked in 1997 to describe the kind of conflict for which Marines were training, Gen. Charles Krulak, then the Corps' commandant, replied with one

word: "Chechnya." He meant ethnic and sectarian conflict in an urban context. He spoke of "the three-block war" in which a Marine wraps a child in a blanket, then is a buffer between warring factions, then engages in combat, all within three city blocks.

For Marines, however, fighting such a war for more than four years jeopardizes the skills essential to its core mission — combat as an expeditionary force. Marines have not conducted a major amphibious landing since Inchon in Korea, but the Corps, which specializes in operational maneuver from the sea, remains, in theory, a force that penetrates, performs, then departs. Marines say: The nation needs the Army, Navy and Air Force, but it wants the Marine Corps as an expeditionary power, more than just a minaturized Army.

Marines have an institutional memory of "small wars," from the Philippines to Central America, and this competence serves them well in Iraq, which is, an officer here says, "a thousand microcosms." But the exigencies of the protracted Iraq commitment have forced the Marines to adopt vehicles that are heavier and bigger than can easily travel with an expeditionary force on ships. And there is tension between the "nation-building" dimension of the Marines' Iraq mission and the Corps' distinctive warrior esprit, which is

an integral to why the nation wants the Corps.

Officers studying here at the Marine Corps University after tours in Iraq dutifully say they understand they serve their combat mission — destroying the enemy — when they increase the host nation's capacity for governance. Besides, says one officer, when his units are helping with garbage collection they know "garbage collection is a matter of life and death because there are IEDs (improvised explosive devices) hidden under that garbage."

Still, no one becomes a Marine to collect garbage or otherwise nurture civil societies.

Early in the Kennedy administration, when there was talk about a U.S. invasion of Cuba, Gen. David M. Shoup, Marine commandant, gave President John Kennedy and his advisers a tutorial. David Halberstam wrote in "The Best and the Brightest":

"First he took an overlay of Cuba and placed it over the map of the United States. To everybody's surprise, Cuba was not a small island along the lines of, say, Long Island at best. It was about 800 miles long and seemed to stretch from New York to Chicago. Then he took another overlay, with a red dot, and placed it over the map of Cuba. 'What's that?' someone asked him. 'That, gentlemen, represents the size of the island of Tarawa,' said Shoup, who had won a Medal of Honor there, 'and it took us three days and 18,000 Marines to take it.'

Because of the dispersed battlefield in Iraq, company commanders must make instantaneous decisions that battalion commanders used to make, and corporals are making decisions that officers used to make reflecting — and affecting — the Marine Corps' ethics and core values.

George Will, a Pulitzer Prize winner, is a columnist for The Washington Post. E-mail: georgewill@washpost.com.

THOMAS SOWELL

There is progress in Iraq

Nothing is easier than to second-guess other people's decisions, ignoring the inherent limitations of knowledge, the pressures of circumstances and the dangers of alternative courses of action.

Americans in all parts of the political spectrum have made serious mistakes about Iraq.

Some have been the mistakes of honorable people. Other people have acted with utter dishonor and dishonesty — the most shameful recent example being the smearing of Gen. David Petraeus as a liar before he had said a word.

Precisely because congressional Democrats already knew there had been progress after the troop surge in Iraq — some of their own colleagues had been there and seen it — they had to discredit Petraeus, in order to prevent the American people from knowing it.

Democratic Congressman James Clyburn said it all in an unguarded moment when he admitted that an American victory in Iraq "would be a real big problem for us" in next year's elections.

What of the mistakes of the Bush administration?

The book "Mugged by Reality," by John Agresto, based on his experiences as a civilian adviser in Iraq, makes it painfully clear that the attempt to create a democracy in Iraq was the biggest failure of good intentions there and the key to much else that went wrong.

The idea was that democratic nations do not fight each other or sponsor terrorist campaigns against one another.

Therefore, if we could create a democracy in Iraq, we would have made a historic contribution to world peace by

One of the most significant challenges faced by colleges and universities in fulfilling this mission is addressing the impact our consumer culture is having on the current generation of young people.

In a state with a proud tradition of hard work, close-knit communities and faith in God, too many of us have become captive to a consumer-driven culture that encourages a purely personal understanding of self-fulfillment, causing us to feel less and less obligated to our fellow citizens in common projects and goals.

Not surprisingly, many elected leaders perpetuate a definition of obligation that simply stresses charity while ignoring justice and the skills of citizenship. By merely focusing on alleviating the effects of poverty, charity, by itself, fails to challenge the complacency of citizens. Justice, on the other hand, by seeking to eliminate the causes of poverty, leads directly to challenge, self-reflection and tension.

Our colleges and universities cannot, in good conscience, merely be occasional volunteer providers for the poor. Often best situated to offer vision, credibility and leadership, our institutions of higher education must participate in helping Alabamians increase the realm of duties we define as moral responsibilities.

Working toward a degree in one of our many institutions of higher education, our students must realize that with the privilege of being better educated than three-fourths of our state's population comes an obligation — an obligation to understand that every individual's life has dignity and worth, and everyone's health, education and potential to succeed are worth fighting for.

As our state tax structure places an unfair burden on average working families, as countless children remain uninsured, we should all feel a duty to act. With Alabama's distinctive sense of val-

ues rooted in the church, the land and the community, the requirements of us as citizens should be understood in their theological dimensions. No other state's college graduates should be as well-furnished to embrace the biblical mandate: "For everyone to whom much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).

The Alabama Poverty Project, the Center for Ethics & Social Responsibility at the University of Alabama, Impact Alabama and the UAB Center for Urban Affairs will host a statewide conference, "To Whom Much Is Given," on service learning in higher education Sept. 27 and 28 in Tuscaloosa.

This conference will bring together professors, administrators, students and community partners from campuses and organizations across Alabama to establish a network of best practices in facing issues of poverty in Alabama.

A progressive future for Alabama will

require our colleges and universities partnering with business, civic and faith leaders to inspire communities to re-evaluate their priorities and move from silence, apathy and accommodation to active engagement.

This new era will be stamped in history as the point at which our institutions of higher education reassured their commitment to assist students in developing a distinctive definition of moral and civic maturity, making the values and skills of citizenship a hallmark of a college education received in Alabama — and in the process, helping to create a better world for our children.

Stephen Foster Black is director of the UA Center for Ethics & Social Responsibility; founder and president of Impact Alabama, a student service initiative; and board member of the Alabama Poverty Project. E-mail: Stephen.black@ua.edu.

The MARLBORO JOURNAL of MEDICINE

by Matt Bors

WITH HELP FROM ALAN BLUM, MD

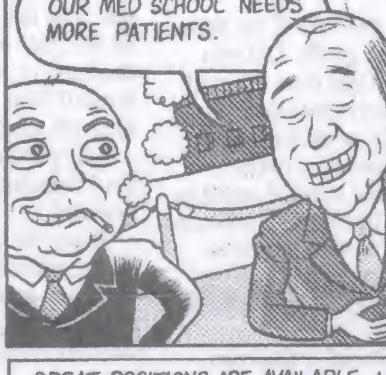
JOB FAIRS. A TIME WHEN COLLEGE STUDENTS SPREAD THEIR WINGS AND EXPLORE CAREER OPTIONS.



AND AMONG THOSE TRYING TO CATCH THEIR EYE...



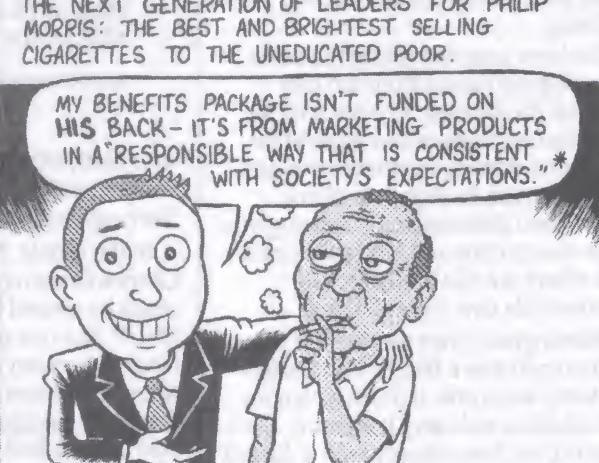
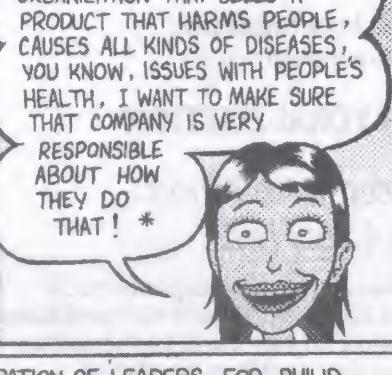
UNIVERSITIES AROUND THE COUNTRY HAVE BEEN ROLLING OUT THE RED CARPET FOR THE TOBACCO GIANT'S NEW RECRUITMENT PROGRAM.



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SPECIAL

The University of Alabama and Tuscaloosa's DCH Regional Medical Center co-sponsored a special emphasis week on cancer prevention recently, moderated by distinguished UA alumnus Dr. Charles LeMaistre, a member of the committee that wrote the landmark 1964 Surgeon General's Report, "Smoking and Health." LeMaistre and other speakers reminded audiences that cigarettes remain by far the leading preventable cause of cancer deaths and that Alabama's high prevalence of men who smoke (29.5 percent) is exceeded only by Kentucky. The ink had not yet dried on the news coverage of the UA Cancer Prevention series when Philip Morris USA, America's largest cigarette manufacturer (and the maker of top-selling Marlboro), was welcomed back to campus by the UA Career Center for its fall 2007 job fair. None of the more than 80 other employers at the Sept. 19 event received as prominent visibility as Philip Morris, which also hosted the hospitality suite and plied hundreds of students with free food, tote bags, phone cards, radios, leather binders and other gifts. Dr. Alan Blum, professor of family medicine and director of the UA Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society, worked with Portland, Ore., cartoonist Matt Bors to file this taste of today's campus career fairs. E-mail: ablum@cchs.ua.edu.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



"I stand on my record of balanced budgets, clean budgets and honest leadership."

Birmingham Mayor
Bernard Kincaid, at a forum last week with the men and women who are trying to take his job

Bernard
Kincaid
The current
mayor of
Birmingham
who is running
for a third term



Hassan Jabir is recovering from gunshot wounds.

"I swear to God that they were not exposed to any fire. They are criminals and thirst for blood."

Hassan Jabir, a Baghdad lawyer wounded last Sunday by private security guards employed by Blackwater USA. The Iraqi government says at least 11 people were killed in unprovoked shootings by the guards.

"The U.S. isn't so mighty anymore."

Toronto resident Brian Lee, on the Canadian dollar reaching parity with the U.S. dollar for the first time since 1976

planting the first democracy in the Arab Middle East.

Perhaps the strongest support for this theory came from the actions of the terrorists themselves, who have poured men, money and weapons into Iraq on a massive scale, and blown themselves up in suicide attacks, in order to prevent this project from succeeding.

However, as Agresto points out in "Mugged by Reality," democracy has prerequisites — and those prerequisites are not universal, especially not in Iraq.

President Bush has rejected the idea that some peoples and cultures are not ready for democracy. He points to the large Iraqi turnout at the elections, despite the threats of terrorists. Everyone wants more freedom, he and his supporters say.

Wanting freedom, however, is not the same as wanting others to have the same freedom you have. Such tolerance is not the norm in Iraq.

Agresto points out how Americans' organizing the Iraqi government on the basis of competing interest groups made reconciliation harder, if not impossible.

He notes that those who founded the United States organized political power on the basis of territory, so that mutual accommodations among people with different views within given communities were a prerequisite for gaining power.

What recent progress has been made in Iraq has apparently been made by mobilizing traditional local and regional Iraqi leaders and coalitions, not by relying on the democratically elected central government. There may be a lesson there.

Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution in Stanford, Calif. His Web site is www.tsowell.com.

"I made a mistake. I apologize to the court, to my wife and family and to the thousands of people who live here in Jefferson County."

Former Jefferson County Commissioner Chris McNair, who was sentenced to five years in federal prison last week for corruption